

Why you need a shredder: Seniors strike back at mail fraud

Kathy Engle

Green Valley News

May 22, 2007

Green Valleyans Jerry Belenker and Bobbi Tucker, volunteers for the Attorney General's satellite office in Green Valley, sort through mounds of junk mail Monday.

Volunteers from Green Valley and staffers from the Attorney General's office sorted through huge piles of mail plus a U.S. Postal Service box crammed with more Monday, as part of the Seniors Strike Back Program.

As participants in the program, which aims to cut down on mail scams, many Green Valley residents sent their junk mail to the Attorney General Terry Goddard's office in Tucson or dropped it off at the Green Valley Community Coordinating Council offices in the Green Valley Mall for Monday's event.

Wendy Cevallos, community outreach coordinator for Goddard in Tucson, and Brenda Kroth, staff member for the AG and outreach volunteer, brought several boxes for sorting the junk mail.

Many mail scams

Boxes were labeled: Investments, Sweepstakes, Charities, Credit Cards, Free Offers, Political, Psychic, Insurance, Political, Credit Cards, Investments, Automobile, Medical, Mortgage Loans and Miscellaneous.

Jerry Belenker, a volunteer for the Attorney General's satellite office in Green Valley, pointed to one letter which claimed to be from the "Audit Bureau." "It's very official-looking," he said. "It looks like it's coming from the IRS."

Belenker was on familiar turf Monday since he was a lawyer for the U.S. Postal Service before retiring.

He pointed out that while the Postal Service can seize mail suspected of being fraudulent, return it to the sender, or seek an injunction prior to prosecution, there's no relief to consumers targeted over the Internet.

"There's no jurisdiction over the Internet—yet," he said.

\$19 million "winner"

While volunteers were busy sorting, Quail Creek resident Jacob and Donna Wieb brought in a letter informing them they had inherited \$19 million from a relative's

estate in England.

The catch: The couple had to mortgage their house to get the money.

"It looks official, but if it looks too good to be true, it probably is," Donna said.

Linda Landry of Care Coordinators Inc. came to the event Monday with a large pile of mail sent to her client, who lives in Silver Springs retirement center.

Landry said mail solicitations are only part of the problem, noting that she has another client who responds to telephone solicitations which his caregivers often have to overrule and negate.

"When people get phone solicitations, they are often pulled in because of loneliness, especially in communities like Green Valley. They just like to have someone to talk to. We have to reach out to people in that situation," said Kroth.

Frequent targets

"Seniors are targeted more often for mail fraud and other scams, along with minorities and immigrants because they are vulnerable and trusting," said Cevallos.

"We get more scams in Arizona than any other state because of our population," she said.

Green Valley resident Ann Drusilla brought her junk mail in, then stayed to help volunteers Belenker, Bobbi Tucker, Glenn Osborne, Gregg Zeller and the attorney general's staffers with the sorting.

After about two hours, the sorted mail was taken to Goddard's Tucson office where it will be turned over to consumer fraud investigators. They will review the mail to determine which cases to pursue for prosecution, Cevallos said.

Similar events were held around the state and junk mail can be dropped off at the GVCCC offices through May 30. That mail will be taken to Goddard's office as part of the Seniors Strike Back program.

The Attorney General's satellite office, staffed by trained volunteers, is open Mondays from 1 to 3 p.m. at the GVCCC offices. Volunteers can provide information and assistance on consumer fraud, civil and victims' rights and other issues and can help individuals file complaints or get referrals.